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DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE HEARS 11 PETITIONERS ON SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR

The people of East Timor were victims of severe repression by the Indonesian Government and should be allowed to determine their own future through a popular referendum, according to petitioners speaking at this morning's meeting of the Special Committee on decolonization.

Statements were made by petitioners from the following bodies: the Hobart East Timor Committee; Asia Watch; the Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples; the Association de Solidarité avec Timor Oriental; East Timor Alert Network; the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples; the Indonesian Human Rights Campaign (TAPOL); the Catholic Institute for International Relations; the Fund for Free Expression; and Amnesty International; and a speaker representing the Indonesia Committee, the East Timor Working Group and the X-Y Movement.

When the Special Committee meets next at 3 p.m. today, it is expected to continue hearing statements from petitioners on the question of East Timor.

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Programme of Work

The Special Committee on decolonization met this morning to begin consideration of the situation in East Timor. It will hear petitioners during the day-long examination of the question.

The General Assembly had, between 1961 and 1982, annually reviewed that question, adopting resolutions on it on the basis of reports submitted to it by the Special Committee.

According to a Secretariat working paper (document A/AC.109/1037, dated 26 July 1990), the Government of Portugal, the former administering Power, had since April 1977 informed the Secretary-General that owing to the conditions in East Timor it had not been possible to transmit information called for under a provision of the Charter (Article 73 e).

By its resolution 37/30 of 23 November 1982, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to initiate consultations with all parties directly concerned to explore avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem. The Secretary-General had since 1983 kept the Assembly informed of his efforts. In his latest report to the Assembly at its forty-fourth session, he stated he had obtained reaffirmation from both Indonesia and Portugal of their commitment to achieving a comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor.

With regard to recent political developments in the Territory, the Secretariat working paper stated that general elections were held on 23 April 1987. Mario Carrascalao had been sworn in for a second five-year term as "Governmor" by the Indonesian Minister for Home Affairs.

On the question of human rights in the Territory, the working paper quotes the United States Department of State as stating, among other things, that serious human rights problems remained.

Also before the Special Committee is a letter from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia (document A/AC.109/1045, dated 31 July 1990), which expresses his Government's "strong opposition" to the participation of the petitioners in the deliberations of the Committee.

The letter states that the process of decolonization in the Territory had been carried out in conformity with the provisions of the Charter and of General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV), thus terminating the colonial status of the "former Territory". The letter goes on to state that: "Consequently, the integration of East Timor into the Republic of Indonesia was formalized on 17 July 1976 as its twenty-seventh province with rights and obligations equal to those of the other provinces" of Indonesia.

Statements by Petitioners

DOUGLAS McGREGOR, of the Hobart East Timor Committee, said he believed that United Nations support and persistence would enable East Timor to join the ranks of the free and independent countries in the near future. He said

he saw the parallels between South African and Indonesian intransigence as colonial Powers. Just as South Africa had refused to negotiate directly with the Namibian people so Indonesia refused to negotiate with the East Timorese. The nations which had supported South African colonialism were largely the same nations that supported Indonesian colonialism. South Africa's wish to retain Namibia because of its mineral wealth was mirrored by Indonesia's wish to retain East Timor because of the vast supplies of oil believed to be below the Timor Sea. And just as South Africa had claimed to be "developing" and "civilizing" the "primitive" Namibia, so does Indonesia claim to be "developing" and "civilizing" the "primitive" East Timor. Yet the claim of development was insidious, as its was used to divert attention from the fundamental right to self-determination.

He said all Indonesian actions in East Timor seemed to have a military or propaganda function as their first priority. The harm of that occupation did not stop at East Timor's borders; while Indonesia claimed to be developing East Timor, millions of Indonesians continued to live without such fundamental services as clean water, primary health care or basic education. Indonesia could ill afford its occupation of East Timor, he said. The war has been costly in human and economic terms.

Despite 15 years of oppressive military occupation, he went on to say, the people of East Timor continued to seek self-determination with great courage and persistence. The oppressive nature of Indonesian colonialism could no longer be hidden. He commended the commitment of the Portuguese Government and the United Nations Secretary-General to achieving decolonization in East Timor, and especially the work of the Special Committee.

SIDNEY JONES, of Asia Watch, said the human rights situation in East Timor remained a cause for grave concern. Ongoing abuses included summary executions by members of the Indonesian armed forces; arbitrary arrests; torture and other forms of physical abuse during interrogation; and severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly East Timorese suspected of aiding the armed resistance to Indonesian rule were subject to arrest, torture and, in some cases, summary execution. Indonesian security forces, whether police or military, routinely used torture or other forms of pressure to extract admissions of guilt from suspects, Ms. Jones went on to say. However, to Asia Watch's knowledge, no member of the Indonesian military has ever been found guilty of a human rights offence in East Timor.

Relatively few political detainees were held for lengthy periods or tried. However, while long-term detention might have become the exception rather than the rule in East Timor, more East Timorese were subject to short-term arbitrary detention than in the past, she said. Prevention detention could take place before an important anniversary or visit by a prominent official and a small demonstration could lead to widespread arrests afterwards. East Timorese had virtually no freedom to voice their opinion on certain topics or to gather in large groups, while criticism of the Indonesian Government or its policies was generally off-limits, not only to East Timorese but to Indonesians as well.

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Demonstrations in East Timor took place with greater frequency now, but the Indonesian military authorities continued to respond with force. Moreover, using wives as virtual hostages to force their husbands to surrender had been a practice of the Indonesian military in East Timor since the beginning of the invasion, she said.

MICHEL ROBERT, of the Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, said arrests, rape and torture were the order of the day in East Timor. Massacres continued and the latest carried out by Indonesian troops had occurred last Easter. Photographs of the incident had reached Lisbon. Those attrocities represented an official policy, he stated, and quoted statements by an Indonesian general who had vowed to crush opposition by the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN) supporters, he said. He said the military intervention carried out by Indonesia in 1975 made its annexation of the Territory -- without the approval of the East Timorese people -- illegal.

He reiterated his call, made previously, that the opinion of the International Court of Justice should be sought on the question. Earlier, Mr. Robert had stated that his organization had been founded in 1943 in France in the wake of Nazi atrocities in Europe. It had been its objective to ensure that such acts never happened anywhere again.

PALETTE GERAUD, of the Association de Solidarité avec Timor Oriental, said the people of East Timor rejected their 1976 annexation and demanded the right to self-determination. Yet the Indonesian Government tried daily to crush, no only FRETILIN, but also the civilian population, she said. The European Parliament had condemned the genocide against the people of East Timor.

Those people, she continued, had been subject to particular brutality during the visit of Pope John Paul II to East Timor. Yet acts of repression were not limited to special events such as the Pope's visit. A series of massacres had taken place in several villages, one of which had been totally burned to the ground. The people of East Timor must be free to determine their own future, she said.

BILL RIPLEY, of the East Timor Aletr Network, said the Indonesian assault on East Timor was a genocide supported by industrialized States, all of them Members of the United Nations. The invasion, subsequent military operations and colonization schemes, indeed the very existence of the aggressor regime itself, all were the direct result of first world sponsorship.

Canada's role, which his network monitored, had been substantial, even pivotal, he said. It had $1.4 billion invested in Indonesia and contributed tens of millions of dollars yearly in funding and development aid. Canada supplied the regime with an arsenal of military equipment. Canadian investments were protected by a police State that enforced through violence and oppression, a cheap, strike-free work force and a population too

terrorized by government death squads and State decrees against "communist remnants" to protest corporate hegemony. It was that "investor's paradise" that the regime was attempting to impose on East Timor.

He said that last February, the Canadian Government had announced the sale of 100 Pratt and Whitney engines, which were for Bell 412 military helicopters assembled in Indonesia. Other Canadian arms dealers provided Indonesia with security equipment, ammunition, military vehicles, radar equipment, parachutes, military radios and navigation systems for helicopter and planes. Far from restricting permits to arms dealers, the Canadian External Affairs Ministry had gone as far as to host an arms show in Jakarta in 1984, which exhibited the wares of 10 Canadian military manufactures.

Although Canada supported Indonesia directly in the regime's occupation of East Timor, it also contributed collectively with other States through the World Bank and other international consortia. The World Bank funded Transmigration, Indonesia's colonization scheme, and its population control programme, the latter, in particular, having a devastating impact on East Timor, he went on. The beneficiaries of that assistance were not the Timorese, nor were they intended to be. By funding Transmigration, the Bank subsidized first-world engineering firms and building contractors, population control, pharmaceutical companies and, in that way, shared the dubious distinction with tobacco companies of targeting women and the third world to expand corporate markets.

He said the East Timor Alert Network strongly urged the Special Committee to call for the immediate withdrawal of Indonesian troops and for recognition of the Timorese right to self-determination. It should also recommend that United Nations Member States cease all military sales to Indonesia; that the World Bank cancel funding of Transmigration, and, similarly, cancel funding of Indonesia's population control programme; and that all peace talks on East Timor include members of the Timorese resistance or of the Timorese exile communities in Australia and Portugal, and that their peace plans be on the agenda of such negotiations. He said free access should be allowed to human rights groups of all regions of the Territory as well as to non-governmental aid organizations that respected the wishes and cultural autonomy of the Timorese.

RENE BARREAU, of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, said violations of human rights and resistance to Indonesian presence had been a constant feature of the occupation of East Timor. He added that, in referring to the resistance of the Timorese, the Indonesian Defense Minister had promised "to crush them all".

The Government of Indonesia believed that integration had resolved the problem of decolonization, but the Timorese people did not agree. They were still traumatized by the harsh occupation of their land. Rapid change had caused a cultural shock among the Timorese, who had been compelled to learn the language and history of Indonesia. He called for a referendum to allow the people to decide their won destiny, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

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ALEXANDER GEORGE, of TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, speaking about the features of colonial rule in East Timor today, said the Territory was an "army project", and that cosmetic changes like the promotion of tourism had not changed anything for the people. East Timorese refugees who had recently fled their country to seek sanctuary in Portugal and Australia all had confirmed that East Timor was one big concentration camp.

In February this year, troop reinforcements had arrived in East Timor. Following their arrival, the army had embarked on new military operations until May. Those were "mopping-up" operations, in preparation for a visit to East Timor by a Portuguese parliamentary delegation in August or September. It was now certain that the visit would not take place which might explain why the operations had been scaled down. The army was also continuing its relentless pursuit of Xanana Gusmao, the leader of the resistance forces and commander of Falintil.

He said the other dimension of army rule was the "hearts and minds' strategy, a characteristic of Indonesia's counter-insurgency strategy since the early 1980s. After 15 years of illegal occupation, people in urban centres like Dili and Baucau had learned how to function within Indonesian structures and were adopting new forms of civil disobedience.

The Indonesian army's civic mission had been answered by civil disobedience, with open acts of defiance occurring in the urban centres. Youngsters had been as resourceful as their Palestinian soul-mates of the intifadah. Besides the more spectacular demonstrations that greeted Pope John Paul last October and the United States Ambassador in January, young Timorese were stoning cars, puncturing tires, burning down Indonesian markets and pestering those alien intruders with questions like "when are you going home"?

He said a team of Indonesian sociologists had recommended an end to the war situation, an end to the "overdose of army personnel" and also called for an end to the Government's resettlement programme.

JOHN G. TAYLOR , of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, said the history and experiences of the East Timorese people had been replaced by a version of events that was a fabrication -- first by Portugal and now by Indonesia. The Indonesian Government claimed that the army invaded East Timor at the request of the East Timorese community; that the people of East Timor opted to join Indonesia in 1976; and that the nationalists who resist Indonesian rule do not command popular support. The Portuguese Government and most academics outside Indonesia claim that the great majority of East Timorese opposed the invasion; that the population had never completed an act of self-determination, still less voted to join Indonesia; and that the survival of a resistance movement was evidence of East Timorese alienation from Indonesian rule. The historical version of events presented by the Indonesian Government was false, he said, and could not be defended when set against the facts.

The history of East Timor's people had for too long been prejudged by other interests and other Powers. That was an injustice which was as

corrupting and destructive as the violations of human rights that had so often been brought to the Committee's attention. The United Nations Charter was clear in stating that peoples should be free to determine their own future, he said. Only then would the true version of East Timor's history be able to prevail.

Rt. Rev. PAUL MOORE, Jr., retired Episcopal Bishop of New York, at the outset of his statement said the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, which the whole world had condemned, was similar to the Indonesian action in East Timor, which had escaped widespread condemnation. He then spoke about a visit to East Timor he and his wife had made last December under the auspices of Asia Watch, a human rights committee located in New York. He said they had, immediately after their arrival in Dili, sensed the presence of security forces. They had been told during the visit that many of the people with whom they had met or even those with whom they had a casual exchange were interrogated about the conversations. Apparently, the tapping of telephones was so blatant that in one instance, they were told, the monitor requested the caller not to speak in Portuguese because the monitor only spoke Indonesian. All mail to and from the island was censored.

The troops harassed poor people in rural areas of East Timor, forcing villagers to leave their land -- which the military or those acting on their behalf then lay claim to and farmed for profit.

From their talks it was evident that the role of the church was crucial. Bishop Belo and many other church leaders they spoke to felt that the people of East Timor were threatened with cultural genocide. The Bishop felt there should be a referendum to decide the form of government the people would like to have. He said he worried about the Bishop who was beleaguered and who felt that his life might be in danger.

He drew the attention of the Special Committee to the consistent concern of the suffering in East Timor, expressed by members of the United States Congress and the need for an equitable solution to the conflict, in addition to timely measures in the humanitarian and human rights fields.

GEOFFREY ROBINSON, of Amnesty International, said that over the past two years, his organization had documented the emergence of a pattern of short-term detention, ill-treatment and torture of alleged political opponents of Indonesian rule in East Timor. It continued to receive credible reports of extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and the systematic use of torture against political detainees. It remained concerned about hundreds of unresolved cases of "disappearance" and the continued imprisonment of at least 11 alleged supporters of FRETILIN, sentenced in trials which Amnesty International believed were not fair. Finally, he said in spite of repeated requests to the Indonesian authorities, Amnesty International had not yet been able to visit East Timor.

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In Amnesty International's view, the pattern observed had all the hallmarks of a systematic strategy to silence real or suspected political opponents of the Government and to obtain political intelligence through coercion and intimidation.

Amnesty International had evidence which directly contradicted the assertion by Indonesian Government and military authorities that they had not arrested demonstrators over the past year. The torture and ill-treatment of alleged political opponents held in military detention centres had been a consistent feature of Indonesian rule in East Timor, he said, and Amnesty International continued to receive numerous reports of the ill-treatment and torture of suspected rebel sympathizers in the countryside.

The evidence suggested that political trials in East Timor were deficient in some or all of the following respects: testimonies of both defendants and witnesses were often extracted under duress, sometimes under torture; prosecution witnesses were seldom cross-examined and there were few, if any, witnesses for the defence; trials were conducted in a language which was not always well-understood by the defendants or the witnesses; and the possibility of appeal provided for in the code of criminal procedure was not actively pursued by State-appointed defence lawyers.

Amnesty International remained concerned by reports that people detained by Indonesian security forces in East Timor had subsequently "disappeared" and feared that many hundreds reported to have "disappeared" since December 1975 might have been killed. At least 20 people, and possibly many more, were reportedly killed by Indonesian security forces in 1989 and early 1990 in apparent extrajudicial executions, he said. Most of the victims had been villagers living in areas of suspected rebel activity and in some instances appeared to have been tortured or ill-treated before being killed. He urged the Indonesian authorities to release promptly anyone held solely for their non-violent political activities or beliefs.

The Indonesian Government had an obligation to investigate allegations of serious human rights violations in East Timor, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and torture committed by members of the security forces. It should identify and bring to justice members of the security forces responsible for such violations; make future political trials in East Timor accessible to international observers; disclose the names and places of detention of all people detained with or without charge in the name of "security" over the last two years; and release or bring to trial fairly any accused of political offences. He also urged the Government to permit international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, to visit East Timor in an official capacity, and on a regular basis, in order to monitor the human rights situation there.

HASJRUI JUNAID, speaking for the Indonesian Committee, the East Timor Working Group and the X-Y Movement, said the invasion of East Timor by his country, Indonesia, was a dark chapter in Indonesia's history and he felt it his duty to speak up against the policies of his Government and to denounce the act of aggression perpetrated by the Indonesian army. He said that, since

the invasion, the Government in Jakarta had viciously imposed colonial rule in East Timor. On top of that, East Timor had always been a special project for ABRI, the Indonesian armed forces. The present leadership of the Indonesian army had all served in East Timor and serving there had become paramount for the furthering of the career of an Indonesian army officer.

Although the official figures states that only six battalions were permanently based in East Timor, in reality all the regional military commands in Indonesia were obliged to dispatch units to East Timor. Moreover, special troops, like the notorious red berets, had permanent barracks there. the co-ordination of those semi-permanent troops was regulated by KOOPSKAM, a special military command directly under military headquarters in Jakarta. Despite earlier statements of its disbandment, the military command was still in existence.

At the beginning of last year, the Indonesian Government had taken a risk by "opening up" the area . After one and a half years, the balance did not look very good for Indonesia. More visitors and travellers had been allowed in and the majority of the reports revealed the same story: widespread fear among the people of East Timor. The strategy of opening up had not been a resounding success. The leeways created by the opening had skilfully been used by the Timorese youth to show their will of liberty. The visits of the Pope and the United States ambassador had shown to the outside world the extreme conditions prevailing in East Timor. Opening East Timor to outsiders had been a double-edged weapon. While Indonesian diplomats abroad had welcomed it, Indonesian security officers, police and military alike had warned about the grave consequences for Indonesian rule.

He said the Government's hearts and minds policy was bound to fail. The Indonesian colonial rulers faced two types of resistance: armed resistance in the countryside and the ever-growing acts of defiance in the cities. It could be said that Indonesia had lost the battle to win the hearts and minds of East Timorese youth. For years the Indonesian people had been deceived by its own Government. The war in East Timor was hidden from the Indonesian people, who occasionally heard about the casualties among soldiers and the fierce resistance of the Timorese. Gradually they had seen a change in Indonesia. More information was available and the democratic movement in Indonesia was increasingly focusing its concern regarding East Timor. For the first time the East Timor issue had become a matter of concern among student activists. The recent example of the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait could be compared with the Indonesian invasion of East Timor 15 years ago, he said.

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